JUSTICE

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JUSTICE, Monday Evening, October 21, 1918

South Indian Non-Brahmin Confederation.

(EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION)

PRESIDENT: RAO BAHADUR P. THEAGAROYA CHETTIAR.

Chairman Reception Committee: Prince K. S. Dorai Rajah, B.A.

At the extra-ordinary session of the Non-Brahmin Confederation which was held in the "Justice" Office on Sunday the 20th instant, the following welcome address of Prince K. S. Dorai Raja of Pudukottah, Chairman, Reception Committee, was read by Mr. P. Thirumalai Pillai, Attorney, in the unavoidable absence of the former, being laid up with nfluenza:—

BROTHER-DELEGATES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

On behalf of the Reception Committee, I offer you a most hearty welcome to this extraordinary Session of the South Indian Non-Brahmin Confederation. We are assembled here to discuss the vital issues raised in connection with the revision of the Indian constitution, so as to bring it up to the present requirements. But before I proceed to invite your attention to that subject, I am sure you expect me to give expression to our feelings of satisfaction at the turn the war has taken. The Allied offensive has been producing the most gratifying results, and as the Prime-Minister of Australia said the other day the recent victories may be taken as the beginning of the end. On the Western front the enemy is being pushed back farther and farther. Bulgaria has surrendered unconditionally, and we may take it that the other enemies, if they are wise in time, will follow its example. General Allenby's brilliant achievements in Palestine, and the reports we receive from Mesopotamia and other theatres of the war, inspire us with hope that the time is fast approaching when this gigantic struggle will come to an end. To us, it must be a special source of pride that the Indian troops have upheld their glorious traditions in the battle-fields and enhanced the name of the motherland for loyal devotion to the Empire and those principles of truth, righteousness and humanity for the triumph of which Great Britain and her Allies have been fighting. Need I say that these Indian troops belong to the various Non-Brahmin communities which are represented in this great Confederation? But we cannot afford now to relax our efforts. We may congratulate ourselves that we have done our best in connection with the War Loan, and if any further call is made on us we shall certainly do our duty cheerfully. On the subject of recruitment we must continue to bestow greater attention.

We have entered on the 5th year of the War, and we have begun doubtless to feel more keenly the effects of such a prolonged struggle. In a war of this kind, the economic pressure is always great. But we have to put up with a great deal of inconvenience and some of us have even to curtail the very necessaries of life. The situation is exceptionally hard for the poor to face, but with the help of such of us as have the means to afford them relief it can be made bearable. May I, therefore, appeal to you, the representatives assembled here of the Non-Brahmin communities of the various districts of this Presidency, to take the necessary steps, as occasion demands, to bring timely relief to the poor, the needy and the destitute?

Gentlemen, this is the second Session of the Non-Brahmin Confederation. Last year, when we met, we discussed the general lines of our political advance in the light of the pronouncement of 20th August 1917. We had then to put forward proposals of our own which, we thought, would satisfy the present requirements.

On the present occasion, we are assembled here to discuss and frame our conclusions with regard to the Scheme of Reforms drawn up by the Right Hon'ble The Secretary of State for India and His Excellency the Viceroy and submitted to His Majesty's Government. We are here to go into that Scheme in response to the call made by its authors and by the Government in England for public criticism, and therefore we call this an Extraordinary Session which has nothing else to do but to deliberate upon this Scheme and to formulate our own proposals, with a view to further our political interests.

The Scheme, as you are all aware, was published here on the 9th of July 1918, so that it has been before the public for over three months. It has been subjected to criticism by various political parties and groups of interests from their several points of view.

We shall for a moment consider the attitude of the Home Rulers, who in their Special Congress have passed an elaborate resolution, the most important part of which is as follows "while it recognises that some of the proposals constitute an advance of the present conditions in some directions, it is of opinion that the proposals are disappointing and unsatisfactory......" and again "Re-affirming the principle of the Congress-League Scheme as opposed to those of the Chelmsford-Montagu one and declaring nothing else than full self-government would enable Indian people to take their rightful place in the Empire." It must be borne in mind that this itself was the result more or less of a compromise. Before the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was published, the Congress as a whole stood for the Congress-League Scheme and the Memorandum of the Nineteen as the irreducible minimum with which they would be satisfied for the present. They were only Home Rulers then, whom we would rather choose to describe as Extremists. But since the publication of the report, for reasons which are to us mysterious and inscrutable, some of those very men who have been holding forth on the excellence and transcedental qualities of that piece of constitution-making have suddenly veered round, and found their salvation in the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme as placing India on the sure and straight path to the goal of complete self-Government or Home Rule. But the major portion of those who would have the Congress-Moslem League Scheme and nothing else were firm and irreconcilable. With the Montagu Chelmsford Scheme, they were profoundly disappointed, and you know the contents of the manifestoes issued in Madras and elsewhere denouncing the official Scheme, root and branch. Perhaps, politicians of this latter category refuse to be won over by the smile and condescension of Mr. Montagu or His Excellency Lord Chelmsford, while the so-called Moderates seem easily to have succumbed to them.

Mrs. Besant has told us in so many words that the original draft of the Joint Report was shown to her and to some of her friends. On this subject there has been some controversy. Whether a State document of this kind could be justifiably shown to the leading members of one party in India and that, the party of Extremists who are anxious to set up an oligarchy of their own in the place of the British Government by undermining its authority, by damaging its prestige, and by a systematic campaign of villification of everything British, while not a single member of any other party was invited to this official confidence, is a matter on which there cannot be two opinions. All I can say is that it is most unfair. Some of the Non-Brahmins of this Presidency as well as of other Presidencies were given formal interviews by the Secretary of State and His Excellency the Viceroy, and there was no more consultation with them. They were not given the faintest glimpse of what these two statesmen were going to do. It came about that we were not alone in this respect. Even the members of the non-official European community in India were not taken into the confidence of these high officials, and you know that the Secretary of the Calcutta European Association has sent in a protest against this distinct and inexplicable preference shewn to the Extremists. To this day, so far as I am aware, no satisfactory reply has yet been vouchsafed to this protest. Is it any wonder then that not only in a section of the Press in India but also in the British Press, the charge was made against the eminent authors of the Reform Report that they tried to placate the implacables, even at the expense of alienating the feelings and injuring the interests of the loyal millions of India? I shall, in this connection, quote one sentence from a letter which appeared in the London "Spectator," one of the greatest and most respected of journals in England: "Mr. Montagu represents the Brahmins. Let Dr. Nair represent the non-Brahmins". But this is not all. Look into the Report itself. What is the conclusion you draw from it? In almost every page of it you will find attempts made to please the Extremists while the other communities have been disposed of with scant courtesy. Look at the way in which our demand for Communal Representation has been dealt with. Is that the way in which a serious demand made by the bulk of the population should be dealt with? You are aware that the Secretary of State has since made Communal Representation a question for the Franchise Committee to decide. The manner in which Mr. Montagu announced his decision was characteristic. This is what he is reported to have said in the House of Commons:—"For example, they had stated their objections to Communal Representation. He did not go back one single hair's breadth from what had been said on the point. They had also been accused of trying to divide the people of India in order to rule. It they established Communal Representation on a large scale there would be some justification in that criticism."

Who would be the accusers? We know who they are. But why this solicitude and anxiety to please a class which has been so systematically vilifying the British Government? Mr. Montagu in his Cambridge speech made a defence, I presume not of the people of India, but of this very class whom he described as the progressive part and whom the British Press attacked for their disloyalty. One of the recognised leaders of that progressive part is Dr. Subramania Ayer, the author of the "disgraceful letter", to President Wilson. One would be inclined to doubt very much whether that description given by Mr. Montagu was altogether spontaneous. The letter was in his hands for several months, very nearly a year, and yet he said not a word about it anywhere. He came out with this description only when he was pressed in Parliament by a member of the House. Mr. Montagu's progressive part of the people of India held various meetings to protest against this description and by way of defiance proposed Dr. Subramania Iyer's name to the President-ship of the Congress. These are the people and they are the party for placating whom so much has been done by the present Viceroy and the present Secretary of State. But in what spirit have these Extremists received their approaches? They have simply denounced the report, as I have already said, and have certainly not spared its authors.

In the meanwhile, there were other gentlemen of the Congress-Moslem League fraternity who, possibly because they have been smiled upon and taken into their confidence by these two personages than H. E. the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, thought it incumbent on them to go to their rescue against the attack levelled against those distinguished statesmen by a section of their compatriots. These latter began singing the praises of this Scheme believing fully that the people to whom they addressed their panegyrics on the Congress Moslem League Scheme had forgotten all that was said to them about the celestial qualities of that precious document. There was thus a division in the family, and the effect of it was the somewhat moderate tone adopted by the Extremists at their Special Congress in Bombay and the resolution which they passed to which I have already referred. It cannot be that the attitude of the Extremists of the Special Congress fame must in turn have some influence on the other wing of the Extremist party, now known as the Moderates who have staked their all on the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme. These latter are to have a conference of their own. What modifications they propose, we shall know only when their resolutions are actually published. For aught I know these will do their best to please the Special Congress people as the Special Congress people have done their best to arrive at a compromise which they thought would be acceptable to the seceders. I shall not be surprised if there is not much difference between the two. Their past history tells us nothing else. Why, the modifications suggested by the non-official Members of the Viceroy's Legislative Council give us a foretaste of what may emanate from the Conference of the so-called Moderates.

So much with regard to these two parties who, I emphatically urge, represent neither the masses nor the landed interests of this country. They are the supporters of that oligarchy which is anxious to take the place of the British Government.

Other groups and sections of the people who have a truly representative character of their own have also issued their manifestoes, and is it not, Gentlemen, a striking and significant circumstance that almost by instinct they all ask for Communal Representation? It is the fear of the dreaded oligarchy that induces them to put forth this demand. Centuries of oppression, and the denial of the very elements of knowledge have induced these various communities to ask for a right without which, even under the British Government, their interests as individuals and communities, have suffered materially. It is a regrettable circumstance that the British Government, in spite of a century and half of Indian experience behind it, has done nothing commensurate with the magnitude of the interests concerned to advance the masses and the depressed communities.

To the Europeans in general and to the Missionaries in particular, the masses and the depressed classes have every reason to be grateful for what they have so far done to elevate them. In the field of education, medical aid and for the cultivation of social amenities between Englishmen and Indians, the effect of what the British and American Missionaries have done, we see all round us. Where, for instance, would our Adi Dravida Brethren have been but for the British people, especially the Missionaries? These and other depressed classes, militant Brahminism of the Varnasrama Dharma variety, which practically stands for Hinduism as we know it to-day, has placed beyond the outskirts of Hindu Society there to languish, unthought of and uncared for. But for these Englishmen and for the disabilities cast upon even high caste Hindus by the preistly hierarchy, even Non-Brahmins themselves would not have been able to realise their responsibilities and the spirit of their Brotherhood with the depressed classes and those others who have been in this neglected condition.

Private agencies and private individuals, however benevolent and however philanthrophic and active, could do but little in a work of such boundless dimensions. I do not altogether deny that the Government has done nothing for those who have been mute and voiceless. But I do contend that they ought to have done infinitely more and could have done infinitely more had they been less under Brahminical influence. It is an unfortunate fact that the Government pay their attention most to those who make noise and otherwise worry and embarrass them. I have already alluded to the attitude of Mr. Montagu and to the spirit which permeates and pervades the Joint Report.

If at this time of day when Democracy and Freedom have become the watchwords of the world, and when a gigantic war is being waged for the attainment of these two lofty ideals, British statesmen of the type of Mr. Montagu and H. E Lord Chelmsford should still be guided by the champions of the so-called highest caste, is it any wonder that when such liberalising forces did not so actively operate, the agents of the British Government in India should have followed systematically the policy of everything for the most noisy and practically nothing for the inarticulate and the uninfluential?

Coming nearer home, you will find evidence enough in Madras to prove these contentions. What is it that we hear from all sides in this Presidency? In spite of the events of the past two years and of our demand for the adequate representation and due protection of the interests of our communities, and the backward and depressed classes, the Madras Government go on as if nothing had occurred, still with their eyes open, ignoring and taking little thought of the interests of these communities. What has become of our demand for adequate representation in Public Services, a thing which is entirely within the control of the Local Government? If you have only been reading of what has been appearing in the columns of "Justice", you will find the answer there written in large characters.

Our just demands have been ignored, and those who have been embarrassing and vilifying the Government are still in the ascendant. Now, we cannot allow this policy to continue. We cannot depend on the good wishes, the smiles, the preferences and the idiosyncracies of individual officials. We want our birthright to be recognised. We are the real producers, and tax-payers of this country; and those who produce the wealth of the country and contribute to the Revenues of the Government must have the first claim on the Government and must have the most potent voice in the shaping of their policy. And we are convinced that we can have our place secured to us only if Communal Representation is accorded to us. That is the significance of the demand which we and the backward and depressed classes throughout India make for the recognition of the principle of proportionate communal Representation on a strictly communal basis.

One or two paragraphs in the Joint-Report are devoted to a discussion of the question of Communal Representation. I am inclined to think that those paragraphs could well have been composed without H. E the Viceroy and the Secretary of State taking the trouble of visiting the Presidency towns and receiving representations from public bodies. Mr. Montagu could well have set forth those views sitting in his room in the India Office without the inconvenience and the perils of a sea-voyage to India during war time to accord interviews, to receive deputations and otherwise to have informal conversations with representative Indians and representative bodies. For, they are the views which might be held by an abstract reasoner without any knowledge of the difficulties of a practical politician and statesman sitting in his study surveying humanity from China to Peru, and holding that the Parliament of Man and the Federation of the World must be the fundamental basis for a re-organisation of the world. But Mr. Montagu and Lord Chelmsford are unfortunately at the